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CITATION:

Toda, Takefumi. Puralistic solution to mind - body problem : Berkeley and pragmatism.  
人間存在論 2014, 20: 86-96

ISSUE DATE:

2014-07-01

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/198993>

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## Puralistic solution to mind – body problem : Berkeley and pragmatism

Takefumi Toda

### 1

Mind body problem has been a difficult problem in philosophy, and it has attracted many philosophers. Since modern science proposed a scientific world view, the location of our mind has been threatened, and many philosophers have been worried about how our mind should be located in material world. Descartes' pineal gland is one example of their struggles.

John Locke accepted the corpuscular hypothesis developed by Robert Boyle etc., and constructed his epistemology on that theory. Our perception has sensible aspects as color sensation, sound sensation and tangible sensation, etc. Moreover, it seems to be certain that these sensations exist. But Locke or Descartes thinks that these aspects cannot have a place in material world. Modern scientists or philosophers thought that our material world has only quantitative qualities, for example extension, size, weight etc. Therefore these sensations or sensible qualities must be in another area in the world, and that area is our mind.

For Locke, I think, that mind exists is a doubtless fact. It is doubtless fact that we have thought. And thought is a property which belongs to mind, and not to matter by assumption or definition. In addition, we may give cultural or religious influence to his thought, too. For Locke or Descartes, this dualism is necessary consequence from his scientific world view and certainty of existence of mind.

As we know, Locke or Descartes adopted the causal theory of perception. Material body affected our body directly or indirectly – through medium like light or a wave motion in air. Our sense organs is affected and these affection is transmitted to our brain through nerves. And as a result many phenomena appear in our mind. These phenomena are often called *idea*.

The rough sketch of perception which I now showed is familiar, but here is one source of mind-body problem. The last link between our brain and mind is very mysterious. Locke himself thinks our brain as the seat of our mind, but he could not explain how our mind exists in brain.

Locke's predicament is simple. His explanation about our perception is a scientific and it is explained from third person perspective. Things used in the explanation is basically physical things. On the other hand, mind is not considered as physical thing. It does not have extension and weight. It cannot be seen, felt and tasted. After all, it is supposed to be as opposed to physical thing. We cannot discover a mind even if we cut our head and dissect our brain. It is

because of the definition of our mind that we cannot do it.

## 2

Now I delineated the mind-body problem in modern philosophy. Mind-body problem was caused by the spread of scientific worldview. In other words, mind-body problem is one example that the development of science threatens our preoccupied conceptions. "Threaten" may be too prejudiced expression. Rather we should say that scientific discoveries enlighten and improve our old-fashioned conception. Today's philosophy and naturalistic philosophy which revived in the 20th century may be said to be motivated by such thinking. Today's philosophy may be said to be an attempt to solve the puzzle provided by modern philosopher like Descartes or Locke – using more scientific manners or thinking. Especially many naturalistic philosophers try to solve a puzzle on the base of scientific discoveries. For example, materialists like reductionists or eliminativists – try to define a mind on the base of scientific worldview. Of course reductionists and eliminativists are not the same. But they agree to each other with regard to their start point. They start by the thought that our outer world consist of material objects, and then reductionists would relate our mind to material objects, while the other would eliminate it.

I think that we can point out another point they have in common. They think that physical world is the only real world or that physical world should be thought to be the same with facts. If they do not think so, they do not need to reduce mental things to physical things or to eliminate mental ones. By these reasons I include them under the same group.

But is their direction the only one? I think the quite different way of thinking about mind-body problem. That is, I think there is the quite different start point of thinking. And I think that I can find the key in Berkeley's argument. Hereafter I want to present the way of defending both our mind and our material worlds. But my way is not the same with materialists. My proposal has a possibility of defending both our mind and our material worlds as they are supposed to be by the ordinary people. But I am not the same with traditional dualists. For my proposal may support materialists in some cases. Berkeley is an idealist. My opinion seems to be similar with idealism in some degree, but I do not think these are the same. I will mention it later.

## 3

Berkeley's argument to which I especially pay attention is seen in his *Three dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. Hylas, who is thought to stand for Berkeley's opponents often

presents materialistic argument to Philonous – Berkeley. For example, Hylas presents the physiological argument to Philonous – an agent of Berkeley. According to Hylas, The physiology of the days shows how our ideas are occurred in our mind through our body organs, nervous system and brain. And the explanation indicates that material substances (that is, our body and brain, etc.) exist. To these arguments, Philonous answered as below.

*Phil.* I would first know whether I rightly understand your hypothesis. You make certain traces in the brain to be the causes or occasions of our ideas. Pray tell me whether by the *brain* you mean any sensible thing.

*Hyl.* What else think you I could mean?

*Phil.* Sensible things are all immediately perceivable; and those things which are immediately perceivable are ideas; and these exist only in the mind. Thus much you have, if I mistake not, long since agreed to<sup>(1)</sup>.

In this argument, Hylas' response is too bad. He should not have accepted that brain is a sensible thing. For philosophers like Locke, the brain which appears in the physiological explanation is not sensible or perceivable thing and therefore not ideas. But now, to set this problem aside, I should notice that there is an important point. It is that Berkeley does not deny all scientific discoveries. The thing that he denies is that our perceptual system is not sensible. He replaced them by ideas. Berkeley says that our brain, nervous systems and sense organs are all ideas. But materialistic explanation of perception must also be modified if our perceptual system is changed to ideas. Now, if our brain and nervous systems are ideas, they ought not be the cause of our perception. Because Berkeley professes that only active things can be a "cause" and ideas are not active but inert. For Berkeley considered 'active' and 'voluntary' as the same thing. But how Berkeley managed to reconcile his idealism with then scientific discoveries? I consider that there is one solution to mind-body problem in his answer of this difficult task.

Berkeley makes Philonous say as below in the Third Dialogue.

Philonous [...] We are chained to a body: that is to say, our perceptions are connected with corporeal motions. By the law of our nature, we are affected upon every alteration in the nervous parts of our sensible body; which sensible body, rightly considered, is nothing but a complexion of such qualities or ideas as have no existence distinct from being perceived by a mind. So that this connexion of sensations with corporeal motions means no more than a correspondence in the order of nature, between two sets of ideas, or things immediately perceivable<sup>(2)</sup>.



As these words show, Berkeley accepts our sensations or ideas to be related with our body. But he says that our physiological events and our sensations (= psychological events) are both ideas and that both are correspondent with each other. Berkeley develops his theory about natural law in the Third Dialogue, though this theory was already stated in his first major book *New Theory of Vision*. His attitude for science is showed in below passage.

To explain how the mind or soul of man simply sees, is one thing, and belongs to Philosophy. To consider particles as moving in certin lines, rays of light as refracted, or relected, or crossing, or including angles, is quite another thing, and appertineth to Geometry. To account for the sense of vision by the mechanism of the eye, is a third thing, which appertaineth to Anatomy and experiments. These two latter speculations are of use in practice, to assist the defects and remedy the distempers of sight, agreeably to the natural laws contained in this mundane system. But the former theory is that which makes us understand the true Theory of Vision, considered as a faculty of the soul. (The Theory of Vision: Vindicated and Explained § 43)

When we connect this passage and the before-mentioned passage in *Dialogues*, we can understand Berkeley's claim more clearly. He claims that science – natural philosophy – itself cannot discover the essence of sight, but it is made use of by its usefulness for our ordinary practice, and is connected to our mental or psychological events. We can take Berkeley's claim as that we can connect various natural laws according to our aim or intention. In other words, Berkeley seems to say that we do not need to connect natural science to other natural laws necessarily, if we judge natural science not to be of use for our practice. He thinks that various natural laws, including discoveries of science, are a kind of instruments<sup>(3)</sup>. That is, it seems to be a matter of judgment how to use a natural law<sup>(4)</sup>. I consider his theory of Natural law becomes a key to reconstruction of mind – body problem.

#### 4

In perception, there are some differences between what occurs in our body and what phenomena we have. For Berkeley, these two situations are different sets of ideas, or two natural laws. For Locke or the scientists of the days, what occurs in our physical body is material, objective, and real, but what phenomena we have is mental, subjective, and unreal. And the latter is the effect of the former. In other words, the former – what occurs in our body in perception – is more fundamental than the latter. Berkeley denies this thought and he insists that both are on a par level with each other and there is no difference about fundamentality.

If we think our scientific explanation is fundamental, real or the expression of the true world, we must redefine our conception of our mind or had better eliminate it. And this strategy has been adopted by many naturalistic philosophers who solve the puzzle presented by Descartes. But if we consider both what occurs in our body in perception and what phenomena we have on a par level, we can take another solution.

Berkeley seems to state that we cannot adopt one natural law as basic fact and the other as only phenomena. We can connect various natural laws by our various aims or usefulness. In other words we need not connect certain two natural laws if we think their connection is useless for our practical aim.

Now I can replace Berkeley's natural law as term "contexts". When we talk what we see, feel, or sense, we do it in one context. For example, in dinner, we sit on chair and see dishes on the table. My friend who is a chef of this dinner asks how her dinner looks to me. I answered to her "Very looking appetizing! This tomato's color is very beautiful!" After saying that, I taste this dishes and then say "Very delicious. I keep this taste in mind forever!" Of course this story is dramatized a little. As I am very shy and a man of few words, I cannot say like above. But if I were in the situation like this story, our conversation is held in one context. We have a dinner together and talk about dishes with each other. The information we need is how her dishes appear to me, but not what occurs in my brain. And when I told my last words "I keep this taste in mind forever!", she will not ask me, "Well, thank you. But where is your mind? Is your mind the same with your brain or function of it? Or is your mind unextended and immaterial substance?", if she is not a philosopher — maybe even if she is a philosopher.

But if we are biologists who pay attention to micro stuff in the laboratory, the case is quite different. Our attention may be paid to physical phenomena exclusively. When we study what occurs in our body or what our body consists of, and when we discuss our theory with colleagues, we are in different context from my dinner context. In this context we are not concern with the question of where mind is.

Again if we are doctor and treat the man who has disorder of the sense of taste, the case is quite different, too. We must pay attention to our bodily event and want to relate it to our sensation. Even in this case, we are in quite different context to the above two cases. We are concerned with both the objective status and the subjective status different from my dinner situation. We may be said to be in a position that connects above two contexts.

I took up three contexts as instances. In 1<sup>st</sup> case, we take comparatively naïve attitude to the mind-body problem. We behave as if we had mind as we think we have. But we have no concern with what occurs in our physical body. Even in 2<sup>nd</sup> case, the mind-body problem does not appear clearly. The biologists have an interest with physical aspects of man only, and he studies or talks about how stimulus affecting our sense organs is transmitted to our brain. It may not be important for him to ask where mind is or what mind is. If we take mind-body

problem seriously, it would be the 3<sup>rd</sup> case. But if we extend Berkeley's thought, I think we can escape the difficulty that seems to lurk in that case.

We may think as this. What we do in the third case is to simply relate the first context to the second context for *practice* and create the third context. But the point I want to stress is that we relate two contexts not for achieving the metaphysical truth or disclosing one absolute fact about our body or mind, but for achieving our practical aim, for example, medical cure. Then if this connection is useful for our aim, we should adopt it, despite whether it is concern with the metaphysical facts in our world or not.

As already stated, philosophers traditionally search for the only one answer to the question what mind is. And today they, especially naturalists, often use scientific discoveries as basic fact to solve their problems. Their project may be regarded as showing one unified worldview. Such project is certainly attractive to some philosophers, and I accept that there has been a thought that philosophy should search for showing such worldview. But I do not think that is the only one option. I think it is also the role of philosophy to show that there is no unified worldview.

From this point of view, I state my proposal on using above discussion. I suspect that there is no essence of the concept of mind, or there is the only answer to the question what mind is. Rather, I think that what mind is is determined by situation or context where we use that conception. In some situations (for example in religious), we may talk about mind as if it is immaterial thing, but in other situations, we may talk about mind as if it is physical thing or it is an expression of function of our brain. In each situation or context, we can use the definition of mind differently, even if each definition may be contradictory with each other.

But is there really contradiction? I doubt there is. For contexts are different. If we use the definition of a word differently in the same context, I admit that there is a serious contradiction and we use it unjustly. In such case we must unify the definition of words. But my proposal is not the same with such case. If we think that the definition of a word are determined by context, we do not need to think it is contradictory to give the word different concept in different context.

Here we return to the three cases I took up above. (That is, dinner case etc.) About the first case (= my dinner situation) among them, some philosophers who try to present an unified worldview may think our usage in that case is immature, unscientific, not rigid, metaphorical etc. Some may say that our naïve conception of "mind" is not proper as to *fact*. So if we make clear the truth of our world, we should remake our naïve conception on base of science.

This thought will oppose to the view I now presented. And this may be appealing to not



only philosophers but ordinary people. But this type of thought is also too naïve. For it is the very philosophical problem to ask what the fact is or whether we can get the truth.

Here I will take up other philosophers to defend my view. They are pragmatists. The theories of pragmatists are various, and they are different with each other in some respects. But they seem to agree to each other in that they don't accept an absolute fact that we cannot reach and that they deny there is an absolute distinction between fact and value. They would locate the criteria of truth within us – human.

In twentieth century, the idea that science is an accumulative knowledge system or the idea that science developed straightforwardly came to fall under suspicion. The discussion about scientific revolution by Thomas Kuhn was taken up in many ways and this argument promoted the relativistic theses. Pragmatists of today are among philosophers who were much influenced by such trend.

Some may think it is strange for me to take them up here. For Berkeley would not accept there is not absolute facts or truth, while pragmatists would not accept they are idealist. Berkeley locates objective truth in God's mind and he asserts that even if our ideas are subjective and various, they are uniformly ruled by God's benevolence. And he thinks that philosophy, not natural sciences, reveals the truth of our world. Moreover I must accept that the God's role and existence is the core of Berkeley's philosophy.

But I think that Berkeley's argument gets closer to pragmatism, if we dare to ignore his religious aspect, namely we limit our attention to his argument of natural law. As I have already stated, Berkeley accepts the connection between natural science and our ordinary phenomena by its utility. According to him, it is not because natural science has a privileged status for our knowledge that we use natural science for medical etc. It is not clear whether Berkeley thinks that we can select other connection. Perhaps he does not think so. What is more, it is hard for us ourselves to select a different connection from the connection between natural science and our mental phenomena in medical scene. But in spite of it, I can point out some similarity between Berkeley and pragmatists.

Berkeley argues that our way of talking about various phenomena or our way of theorizing them depend on natural law. And natural laws are chains of our ideas. Their existence depends on human in a sense. I said "in a sense", because it depends on God's will, too. But if it were not for human, there would not be natural laws.

I think that these points which we can see in Berkeley's argument are closer to pragmatists. Pragmatists often deny that truth or facts are outside human's domain.

For example Richard Rorty, who is known as the most radical philosopher of pragmatists, denies the traditional epistemological enterprise. He continued to propose that we should not rely on inhuman authority. The inhuman authority by Rorty is God, truth etc. It is a denial of



absolute truth, in which we can include “fact”. Besides Rorty, Hilary Putnam denied the sharp crack between worth and fact<sup>(5)</sup>. Moreover, Nelson Goodman states about plurality of worlds as below.

I think: many different world-versions are of independent interest and importance, without any requirement or presumption of reducibility to a single base<sup>(6)</sup>.

I think that Berkeley’s ‘natural law’ can be also replaced by Rorty’s ‘vocabulary’ or Goodman’s ‘version’. It is the way of speaking of our world, and it is what we have been creating in various ways.

## 5.

I have stated my consideration by the hint of Berkeley’s argument. But I do not think Berkeley’s argument is unproblematic, so I will state a difficulty which Berkeley’s argument has.

A main difficulty arises from his idealism. “The context” I mentioned is equal with natural laws or a set of ideas in Berkeley’s argument. Now ideas are mental things, therefore Berkeley’s world is just mental or subjective. But is it meaningful to say “All things in the world is mental or subjective”? If all things are mental or subjective, do these words “mental” or “subjective” have any mean?

I think that words have their meaning by contrast with other things. For example, if solipsism were right, in other words, if there were only one person, would the conception of “I” be generated? Did I need the conception of “I”? Does not the conception of “I” exist for distinguishing “I” from “he” or “you”? Of course Berkeley himself would guarantee something like the objective world. It is a domain of Mind of God. Berkeley seems to have only replaced the material substance by God. In this point the structure he adopted is not fundamentally different from materialism.

What we should do for avoiding this problem is to refrain from answering the question whether the framework of our world is mental or physical. Pragmatists including Putnam and Rorty denied the distinction between fact and value. But they do not present idealism, much less reductionism. Whether something is mental or physical should be determined *within* the context, and it should be determined by people who join in the context. So we should not apply one conception to the context itself. If we decide not to do so, we can avoid idealism while we can focus on only the good points of Berkeley.

Now I am going to tell my conclusion of this presentation. What I want to state firstly is that there is not the only one answer to what mind really is. And the result is that we cannot reduce our mind to our brains or some functions of them. In that respect, I am not a physicalist, but at the same time, I am not a traditional dualist, too. We can be not only an either of them, but also both of them. In one situation or context, we can talk as if mind were in our body but not in a physical form. Or in another situation, we can talk as if mind were the same with function of our brains. We can treat the relation between mind and body variously in various contexts. In its sense, I say that mind has various concepts, so I say that my thesis is pluralistic.

Differently from Richard Rorty, I would not say it was useless to wrestle with the mind-body problem as many naturalists have done. And I would not say that we should stop such work. Such work has been contributing to us by enlarging our conceptions or creating new conceptions. And I think this work will have been contributing from now. I think that Philosophers should offer materials for many people to consider what concepts we should use in some problems properly. Speaking about mind-body problem, we should not apply the only one concept to all fields, but try to offer various ways of thinking about which concept is proper to the one field – for example, law, ethics, or religion<sup>(7)</sup> etc., not to another.

I would explain my position a little more. I do not intend to degrade science. I do not criticize scientific activities and reasonableness of science, but only criticize the view that all phenomena should be reduced to science, or that science reflects what world really is. I want to cite Goodman's words again below.

The pluralist, far from being anti-scientific, accepts the sciences at full value. His typical adversary is the monopolistic materialist or physicalist who maintains that one system, physics, is preeminent and all-inclusive, such that every other version must eventually be reduced to it or rejected as false or meaningless<sup>(8)</sup>.

I said that "we should offer materials to think what concepts we should use" in some fields. Then I did not say that we – philosophers should decide what concepts we use. For I do not think that the final decision of it is done within only the sphere of philosophy. For such questions are important for all people who join in the context. We should raise debates and have people interested in them. It seems to me that we had better find the answer of such question democratically. Philosophers should present various materials for such debates and show the possibilities of various considerations. Of course people can select the idea that we should set scientific discoveries as fundamental. And I will not reject such decision necessarily. But I want to emphasize that it is not because science stands near the facts but because many voters judge science to be useful for their aim that people gave science a privileged status. And in fact such judgment will be done in many cases. Science has remarkably contributed to us

and therefore it should be paid respect to.

## 6

In this section, I will illustrate one example for showing a merit of my proposal. Mind–body problem relates to other various problem of philosophy. I think one of these problems is free-will problem. This problem has been discussed for long time, too. And this is similar to our mind–body problem in regard that they are strongly influenced by scientific discovery. Its similarity is natural. For we think that “will” is a mental property. So, if modern science threatens the traditional conception of mind, our free-will would be also threaten. If we consist of only physical things and physical things are connected to the preceding physical things causally, why can we say we have free-will which is thought to belong to mental, not physical?

I had interest with a short essay titled “Is free will an illusion?(9)” before. The writer is Martin Heisenberg, a famous biologist. He discusses the possibility of our free will on base of his research on bacterium. I summarize his argument.

He begins with thought that (1) determinism threatens our free will. But his research shows that bacteria do not act deterministically. They basically go straight forward seeking their food, but they often turn their direction at random. And “this ‘random walk’ can be modulated by sensory receptors, enabling the bacterium to find food and the right temperature(10).” Heisenberg applied this act to more complex one that we human have. And he said that as with a bacterium’s locomotion, the activation of behavioural modules is based on the interplay between chance and lawfulness in the brain. That is, (2) our behavior includes elements of chance. His argument shows that our behavior cannot reduce to a relation between input and output of our stimuli. As a result, our behavior may originate within our body itself in some degrees and (3) we have possibility of defending our free-will from deterministic threat.

He connects an factor of chance with self-originating of behavior, so as to defend our free-will. His strategy may be said to be the one that many compatibilists selected. They will preserve the free-will by change its concepts. But their theories have some difficulties – of course if not so, this problem should have already been solved. As one example, we can see the above argument.

In above summery, a thesis (1) is an assumption which is often shared by philosophers and which may be said to the cause of free-will problem. So we can accept it for the present. The (2) is the result of Professor Heisenberg’s research, so we can accept it. But it is certain that the reasoning from premise (2) to (3) is problematic. Many philosophers on this problem have already realized that we cannot conserve free-will even if we could escape from



determinism. For the randomness or chancy is inconsistent with our being able to select something by our own will.

Of course I know that Heisenberg's proposal is just one example of many proposals. But what I want to say is that we need not be worried about conservation of free-will which was threaten by scientific discovery. In some cases we may not adopt biological study into our legislative or social system by force. They have their own history and sphere. I think that we can handle each field and the combination of them at our own discretion<sup>(11)</sup>.

- (1) Berkeley, *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (eds), Nelson, 1949, p. 209.
- (2) *Ibid.*, p. 241
- (3) See *Principles of Human Knowledge*, sect. 62.
- (4) I know these saying is too misleading or too broad interpretation for Berkeley. He thinks natural laws are settled by benevolence of God, by which their objectivity are assured. Though I said as if how to use natural laws were arbitrary, such thought may be objected by Berkeley himself.
- (5) Rorty as well as Putnam, clearly expresses this. See his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (University of Minnesota Press, 1982), chap. 9, p. 163.
- (6) Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Hackett, 1978.
- (7) I think we can include literature in this list.
- (8) *Op. cit.*, p. 4.
- (9) Martin Heisenberg, "Is free will an illusion?," *Nature* 459, 2009, pp. 164-165.
- (10) *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- (11) This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists (B) 24720010.